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A MODERN QUIXOTE

BY

S. G. McCAY

ILLUSTRATED.

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ONE ARM WAS AROUND THE HUGE DOG'S NECK.

A MODERN QUIXOTE:

A

STORY OF SOUTHERN LIFE

BY

S. C. McCAY

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A MODERN QUIXOTE

CHAPTER I

A typical spring morning in the South; flower bed and blooming tree ablush with exquisite color. Everywhere exuberance of leaf and blossom on the old McNaughton place. Summer, always glorious in this region of middle Georgia, is masking in the splendor of her eternal youth, this once proud homestead of a once proud family.

By peering through the arbor-vitæ hedge which separates the "back yard" from the front part of the grounds, a stranger would view a characteristic scene worthy his notice. It is washing-day, and if you have never seen washing-day in the South, you will probably be surprised to hear it spoken of as one of the most picturesque scenes this country can show.

In the shadow of a thick clump of mul-

berry trees (not the fruit mulberry, but the umbrageous fan-leaved shade trèe) stands a rustic bench supporting a number of huge tubs, all of a subdued natural wood color which harmonizes with the general effect of the knotty old tree trunks against which they are leaning. At a little distance from the washing-stand, a black pot, of very gipsy-like appearance, is standing upon its three short, sturdy legs amid the crackling, flaming sticks, constantly poked under it according to Aunt Viney's directions.

"Washing-day," she says, "ain't nuthin' to what it used ter wuz, on dis yere place. Why, Lawd! chile, I 'members, when my ole missus wuz livin', it tuk nigh on ter a dozen hand to keep it gwine on; why, Honey! it tuk me'n Lucindy'n Altoony to battle de clo'es out when dey wuz dun washed; Unc' Ben, you 'members how many niggers had to go for to tote de wahter, an' all dc little onery wufless pickaninnies on de place could'n do nuffin 'sides jes' to keep de pot bilin'."

The crimson-kerchiefed, white-turbaned figure of old black Viney, as the reader per-

ceives, is the presiding genius of the scene. She and old "Unc' Ben" are the sole remaining representatives of all that group of merry darkies, young and old, who, in happier days, made the old place ring with melody on washing-day. But alas! Aunt Viney cannot sing to-day; she goes about her work with a heavy heart. The old establishment of the McNaughtons, of which she considered herself a chief pillar, is hastening to its fall.

Both Ben and Viney were born on this old place, and considered themselves as much fixtures as the ivy-covered stables, almost untenanted now, or the sentinel poplars that guarded the garden front; but things had come to pass during the last few years, here on the old homestead, after which, anything, save the deluge, would seem to them an impotent conclusion.

Miss Laurie—or "Honey" as the two old darkies called her—was the motherless daughter of their young mistress, who a few short years ago, inherited on her marriage day the flourishing Hargrave estate with all its belongings. Willful as a young queen, Ruth Har-

grave had married Marshall McNaughton, then a dashing young officer fresh from the horrors of Indian battles, whose brilliancy, perhaps, blinded the young girl to possible delinquencies in her hero. Guardians and friends opposed the match bitterly; he was of obscure family and had risen to prominence by sheer personal bravery in the service. His education was defective, but his manner charming. Had her parents been alive, they would probably have prevented the marriage, but this dainty rose-leaf of a woman had all the fire of the South in her veins, and opposition from those about her fanned her resolution into a blaze.

She married him with great ceremony, and installed her handsome husband as master of the vast old estate, with all its acres and slaves. Perhaps, but for one disastrous event, the world would have been obliged to confess itself at fault; for, whereas it had predicted great misery from the *mesalliance*, the early years of the married life of the McNaughtons were an idyl of happiness. When little Laurie was about

four years old, came talk of that tragical mistake, the "Mexican war." It appealed to the military side of Marshall McNaughton's adventurous spirit, which rose to the occasion, and he was soon mounted and on the way, with a body of well-equipped followers, to the Rio Grande; his enthusiastic wife applauding his patriotism, and standing with her little daughter by her side to wave him a "good-bye." This was the fatal step; the life of the camp and field was what his soul loved, but it spoiled him forever for the higher life of home.

With the best that was in him he did homage to his beautiful wife, and under her influence he might still have been saved, but fortunately for the world's reputation for wisdom, and everlastingly unfortunate for him, she died soon after his return, leaving her little daughter to mock him with the lost mother's face at every turn, and the world's "I told you so" was vindicated.

It seemed as though while happiness might have saved this weak, generous nature, sorrow had wrecked it; old habits returned; early

training asserted itself, and he went back to the society of associates from whom the influence of his wife had alienated him for a time.

Notable among these was Hank Staples, a common fellow, but a sort of boon companion, who had been with McNaughton in his Mexican campaign, and who was enabled, by a mere chance, and without any great daring on his own part, to save the major's life on one occasion when the young officer's mad recklessness had placed it in jeopardy. This was sufficient to win him a certain place in the warm heart of his patron from which no revelation of meanness, no ill-bred presumption could dislodge him. Many people whispered that if the unsuspecting major ever had his eyes opened to a fact that was long ago patent to every one else—namely, that Hank Staples had presumed to fall in love with his pretty daughter—there would be an explosion of wrath, after which it would be difficult to find the remains of Mr. Staples. But, strangely enough, he did not see it. He had a tender, almost reverential regard for little Laurie, but it was not able to save him from

his degrading excesses; and just strong enough to drive him back to seek oblivion of his misconduct when she looked at him with her mother's eyes. And so, during the swift years in which she was growing into a beautiful womanhood, he had gone down the whole scale—had sunk from the wealthy owner of a fine old plantation and all its accessories, to the possessor of a grand house with some fields around it which he had not the means to cultivate. Slaves, acres and horses had gone, one by one, each new sale being followed by a more prolonged orgy with Hank Staples and his other friends.

Perhaps it was a certain loyalty to the choice of the young mistress, perhaps it was due to that empire over all hearts, which, in all his downward career, Marshall McNaughton never lost—but something bound the two old servants to the interests of the master with an unquestioning devotion.

"It's Hank Staples and all dat trash what am gwine to ruin my po' Mars'r," was the only reasoning their true hearts would admit.

"Honey soon be a grow'd young lady, Sis'

Viney. 'Pears like 'taint longer'n yestiddy, her ma wuz runnin' 'round yere dis like her; dey's jes' as much like one or nudder as two black peas is," mused Uncle Ben, leaning over to knock the ashes out of his pipe; for just then they caught sight of Laurie's pale pink muslin through the bushes, as she ran in her childish way down the garden path.

"Yes, tank Gawd!" responded Aunt Viney, "her ma's dresses jes' fit her; an' dat yonder pink muslin, what young miss use ter love, kase de major, he say she look jes' like a little chinquepin-rose in it, look jes' 'zactly same on Honey, an' she ain't done nuffin to it cep'n jes' put it on. Dat's de last one of 'em, Unc' Ben," she went on with a dolorous sigh, "and de Lawd know whar she gwine to git no mor'."

She thought in silence for a minute, and then added, "What's de use o' bein' purty if you ain't got no clo'es?"

This was a poser which Uncle Ben's masculine mind could not grapple with. He only shook his head.

"Well," he said presently, "sumpin' got to

be done, Sis' Viney; Honey be a havin' bo's arter while'n den she be a wantin' yearbobs and a heap o' things what she aint nebber been study'n 'bout befo'."

"Humph!" responded Aunt Viney scornfully, "dat show what fools men-folks is; Honey got mo' bo's now dan she kin shake a stick at."

This was hyperbole; Laurie had only one acknowledged beau at this time; but a woman who wouldn't exaggerate a little on that theme isn't half a woman. "Mas'r Walter Marlowe dead in lub wid Honey 'n Honey lub him too, but she don' know it yit."

"Bress de Lawd! yer don' say so, Sis'Viney. Mas'r Walter in lub wid our Honey! Yah! Yah! our little Honey! Why, dey allers play togedder since dey wuz little chillun—but hold on! Sis' Viney, yo' femining min' don' take in de sitiwation. How Dr. Marlowe's son gwine to marry our Honey when de ole gem'man he kaint git 'long wid de major? Don' you know Honey's pa ain't nebber been to hear de doctor preach since young miss die, and he kum over yere to kin' o' comfort us

like, an' den, mas'r he jump up outen his cheer'n he 'lowed he did'n want ter hear no sich nonsense; an' ef de Lawd did'n want him to go to de debbil, what fer he take 'way de only one what could save him? And den he went outen de house an' kep' walkin' 'n walkin', all day out in de fields, by hissef; don' yer recollec' dat, Sis' Viney? An' so," he went on, "I 'lows dat if de doctor is good way down in his heart, he ain't gwine to be willin' for his only son to mah'y de daughter of a man what talks 'gin 'ligion. No, ole 'oman, I reckin you's out in yer kalklations fur wunst."

"Shucks!" Aunt Viney ejaculated; "don' yer know ef Mas'r Walter Marlowe want ter do anyting he gwine ter do it; an' sides, de doctor he tink powerful sight o' Honey; an' he do anyting fer dat boy."

"Yes," consented Uncle Ben, "Mas'r Walter, he powerful fine young gem'man, but his ma and all his folks'll be 'gin his mahy'in us what ain't got no money. Why, dere ain't no fambly in de county cep'n what'd be proud to hab him fur dere daughters."

"Now you's hit de nail on de head at las'," assented the practical Viney; "dat's what I 'low to myself; Mas'r Walter's ma, she powerful proud; 'deed she is."

At this point the dialogue was cut short by the report of a rifle from the direction of the river which was hidden from view by the thick spring foliage, and towards which Laurie had gone a few minutes before.

Without a word further than a profane exclamation from Aunt Viney, both started in the direction of the sound. Aunt Viney had soon reached the bank and signaled that it was all right. A beautiful white bird, called by the negroes the "white heron," was beating his snowy wings in hopeless conflict with the tide which bore him rapidly down the stream. On the bank also, though some distance away, stood the tall, lithe figure of young Marlowe concealed partly from view by the thick bushes. He was busily engaged in examining the lock of his rifle and reloading it for further use. Laurie, who had not seen him, stood, wringing her hands in sympathetic pain, as she watched the beautiful creat-

ure float down the stream, with the death wound in its breast. She had not dreamed that any one was near (as it was a school-day at the college of S—near by) until the loud bang! made her look up from her hammock too late to avert the tragedy. At a sign from his master a large brown setter sprang into the water, seized the huge bird, now dead, in his mouth, and laid it at Laurie's feet. The young fellow in the meantime, by a succession of leaps from rock to rock, had also gained her side, and grounding his rifle with one hand pulled off his cap with the other. What a handsome face it was! bright and smiling now, for he was sure that he had pleased the capricious little lady.

"Look what I have shot for you, Laurie!" pointing with his cap to the bird at her feet; "you said you wanted a white wing to make a fan for commencement and—"

"Oh! you bad boy; how could you do it?" she exclaimed with a little sob, and refusing his proffered hand.

"What! you don't want it? Well, by Jove! ingratitude, thy first name is Laurie!" replied the poor fellow crestfallen.

"G'way from dar! g'way from dar!" screamed Aunt Viney from her position in the bushes, as the dog was about taking the bird in his mouth again. She ran to it, and, kneeling down, spread the large white wings out upon the ground. This was too much for Laurie; she had long wanted just such a fan as these beautiful wings would make; she would not have had the peerless white thing murdered for her for worlds, had she known it; she had a tender little heart, that loved every living thing of field or stream. She looked down on the beautiful plumage; the bird was dead, and the wings were so lovely; she began to relent.

Walter saw his advantage, and, leaning his rifle against a tree, knelt down also, and helped Viney to display the trophy. "Now!" he exclaimed, "cruel woman, how does that strike you? Aren't they handsome?" She was not angry now, but when he looked up at her he was shocked to see that her eyes were full of tears. "O Walter, I am so sorry you killed it, but it was very kind of you to give it to me; indeed I do thank you."

"Reck'n I'll jes' take it up to de house and dry out de wings fur yer, Honey," remarked the practical member of the party.

"Yes, you can go, we don't want you," said Walter. "I will walk back with Laurie in time for dinner." He and Viney had always been the best of friends; she would let him say anything to her.

"Nebber min', young man," she replied, as she shouldered the huge bird and started towards the house. "You's jes' de wustest boy in dis yere town; you knows you is; if you don' stop dem yere larks o' yourn, you ain't nebber gwine to heb'n long side o' yo' pa."

They did not hear her "Yah! Yah!" after she considered herself at a safe distance; "Mas'r Walter de purtiest man I eber see. I hope he gwine ter mah'y Honey'n take her up to his big house, kase I don' know what gwine ter kum o' her ef her pa keep goin' on in dis yere awful way o' hisen;" which proves that Aunt Viney was something of a woman of the world in her way. Could she have divined what took place after she left them, she would have considered her brightest dream realized.

CHAPTER II

Laurie must have forgiven the young fellow for killing the bird, for they were strolling along the romantic little river's brink in an amicable way, the little flickers of shadow and sunlight dancing upon them as they walked. He had his gun over his shoulder and the brown setter Carlo amused himself by running, now before, now behind them, but always keeping them in sight.

"What are you doing out of college to-day? I did not expect to see you on Friday;" she asked him, trying to look demure; but she could not hide from this tall, handsome fellow, as she looked up at him, that she was glad to be surprised, and supremely happy to have him there walking beside her, when so many girls as pretty as she, and far more fortunate in every other way, would have welcomed him proudly. "O! you truant!" she went on, while the happy smile danced in her eyes,

"I thought you were working for the valedictory this year; you know too, how much we all counted on you; have you given up?"

"Well; sit down here on this rock, and I will tell you how it is," he said at last. She seated herself with a little laugh of happiness, and he chose a lower place, so that he sat at her feet, for he wanted to see her face while he told her. He looked so handsome as he sat there, leaning towards her, in his eager way, the morning sunlight shining in his face.

A brilliant face it was, with the clusters of dark hair thrown back from the forehead, and the gleam of snowy teeth and flashing eyes. It was a beauty to which perfect health, perfect happiness, and a generous heart each lent a share. There was one thing which a friend of Walter Marlowe would have eliminated from that face, but which, to the romantic young girl beside him, was, perhaps, its greatest charm; it was a certain look of recklessness, born of an adventurous spirit and excessive physical courage, which won credence for many tales of midnight escapade connected with his college life.

McCay, S. C.

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Graphic studies in climatology. I–
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Bibliographical foot-notes.

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Title from Univ. of Calif. Library of Congress

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True, there had never been a hint of anything dishonorable attached to his name, even in his wildest frolics, but he was classed among the wild fellows of the college. Perhaps the town's people were more lenient in their judgment of him than of the others, for he had lived always in their midst and was known to them all from childhood. He had evidently forgotten what he was going to say; he sat looking into her face in such an unusual way that for the first time in his presence, she felt her cheeks begin to tingle.

"Well," said she, pulling some little grasses in a nervous way—"why don't you tell me?"

"O! that's so—well, I was just going to say that the honors were distributed this morning, and a lucky fellow, whom you know, has come in for the valedictory; so there isn't anything more to do at the college this morning, and I thought I would take a stroll, and see if I could find anything to shoot."

"O! Walter, I'm so glad!" cried Laurie, all her self-consciousness gone now. "Kneel down here and be crowned, sir." He dropped

on one knee and she went through the pantomime of crowning him.

They were laughing and talking in that happy, foolish way that marks so brief, so fleeting an epoch of life; both were beautiful, young, and in love.

"Have you thought of your valedictory speech?"

"Oh! yes," he said, "I have been rehearsing it as I came along. I shall get through it all right if there is *one* person in the audience."

"Rather a small audience otherwise," put in Laurie.

"And if it pleases her, I don't care for the rest," he went on, scorning to notice the interruption. "Do you know who that is?"

"How should I know?" returning to her grasses again.

"She will be the prettiest girl in the house, and she will carry a white wing for a fan."

"Oh! did you have that speech rehearsed too?"

"Of course, and engaged the heron to come here and be shot. But, Laurie, there is something else on my mind this morning a great

deal more important than that. Come, let us walk on to that spot further down where it is so shady and cool, and I will tell you about it."

Viney thought they looked very handsome and very happy, an hour or two later, when she looked up from her work and saw him leave her at the garden gate, and stop again when he was almost out of sight, to blow a kiss to her from his finger tips. Laurie stood still and watched him until she could no longer get a glimpse of his figure, and then, all in a minute, down came a flutter of pink muslin among the husks of the corn Aunt Viney was preparing for dinner; two little white arms were around her neck, and her darling's love story was sobbed out in happy tears upon her faithful old bosom.

"Oh! mammy! Walter loves me; he loves me more than anybody else in all the world! He told me so, and I am going to marry him on commencement day. Oh, mammy dear, I am so happy! I love him so much."

The old nurse had taken her darling into her arms, and patted her gently, as she used

to do to hush her infant crying. She was, herself, too full to speak, for a moment. This was the dream of her life; Honey would be happy and rich. She leant over, still holding Laurie in her arms, and picked up the straw hat that had fallen on the ground and smoothed out the ribbons with a loving touch. Then she tried to raise the dear face from her shoulder. The girl was still crying softly, for very joy, but even these happy tears pained the tender old heart.

"Why, what make you cry so, Honey? Ef you's happy, you ought to be laughin'. I's powerful glad you's gwine to mah'y Mas'r Walter; you'll hab lots o' purty dresses, an' breas'pins to war' ebbery Sunday, an' ole Viney'll set up in de gal'ry an' watch you sittin' in de Marlowe's pew. Yo' pa he comin' home to his dinner purty soon an' he mustn't find his baby cryin' nohow. You jes' run 'long while I gits de dinner ready and bresh out yer ha'r, an' tell him all 'bout it, when he comes; I spec' he be powerful proud."

But the major did not return to dinner that

day; supper time came—the early supper time of the country houses—and as he was still away, they took the simple meal without him. It was not unusual for him to remain in town until late in the evening.

Laurie went to her little chamber all white and flower-scented, as such a maiden's room should be, but she did not go to sleep as usual; she sat down on the side of her snow-white cot in the fair twilight of the spring, her dark, glorious hair falling about her, and dreamed her waking dream, more sweet than sleep could give. While sitting there she was aroused from her reverie by her father's footstep sounding in the room below. It was, still, quite early in the evening and her thoughts would not let her sleep.

She threw around her a wrapper of some soft, white material and stole quietly downstairs again. She paused at the dining-room where the major always loved to take his pipe in the evening. Uncle Ben had brought in the candles and wheeled the master's leather arm-chair to its accustomed place by the hearthstone; for the nights were still a

little chilly, though the spring was well advanced. His pipe and a decanter of brandy stood on a small table at his elbow. He had poured out a glass, but scarcely tasted it. There was a haggard expression on his handsome, dissipated face quite new to Laurie.

He lit the pipe, and looked around once or twice, as though in search of something or some one; presently the fire died out of it, and he laid it down upon the table unfinished. What was the matter with the pipe to-night? What was the matter with the brandy?

She must have known what it was he missed; for presently her arms were about him and a warm, rosy cheek was laid against his. "Is that you, Honey?" he asked laughing; and reaching up an arm he pulled her down into his lap.

"Come here and sit on your old daddy's knee, and tell him what you've been doing all day."

Laurie passionately loved her father; to blame him was to lose her favor entirely, and as a great many did blame him very severely, she kept aloof from a great many houses

"WALTER WAS HERE THIS MORNING, PAPA," SHE BEGAN.

where she would have been welcomed for her mother's sake, but where she knew that her father was not liked.

To sit on his knee, and get her arm around his neck was easy enough; she was used to that; but to tell him all that had happened that day was not so easy. She looked into the fire for a moment and began running her hands through his hair. "Walter was here this morning, papa," she began; managing so that he could not see her face.

"Well—that's no news, tell me somethin' else."

"Well, he's got the valedictory, papa, and he gave me a beautiful wing—for a fan, and he wants me to go to commencement—papa —and hear him speak."

"Well, Honey, you are goin' ain't you? Walter's a fine young fellow; I'm glad he's got it."

"Yes, papa, but if I go, you must get me a new white dress."

"Well, I'll see about it, pet, I'll see."

"But, papa, I must have it soon, for mammy and I must make it before commencement."

"Well you shall have it, baby; you shall have it."

"But, papa—"

"Why, what ails my pet? Is there somethin' else you're wantin'? Speak out, Honey, your old daddy'll do anything to make you happy. There won't be no girl there that'll hold a candle to my Laurie, I'll bet. That'll be a great day for you, when your friend gits the first prize, eh? You always did bet on Walter, didn't you, Honey?"

"Yes, dear, it will be the greatest day of all my life, for it will be my wedding-day. That pretty white dress will be my wedding-dress—for Walter loves me, oh! so dearly, and asked me to marry him on that day. You won't say no, dear daddy? I love him so! I love him so!"

The arms went closer about his neck, and the rosy face was pressed hard against his shoulder.

CHAPTER III

Aunt Viney was right when she opined that "Mas'r Walter's ma" would be the stumbling block. While her husband loved this son, as the dearest gift of providence, she idolized him, but still she worshiped him in her own proud way. Though her will in all great crises bent before the stern strength of purpose in her husband's character, still she was a woman of strong opinions, strong feelings and prejudices. Walter was her only living child, and would inherit through her an independent fortune. She saw that he was handsome, intelligent and spirited, and built boundless hopes upon his future; consequently, his marriage would be a matter of supreme moment with her. She believed in love matches, for her own had been one. Had she not taken her own course when the young preacher wooed her in his manly way, showing towards her the tenderness of his steadfast spirit, so

stern in self-denial, so impervious to all other weakness? What did it matter that he had renounced fortune and lucrative occupations for his high calling? She revered his sublime unworldliness but never dreamed of reaching the level of it herself; she could not have said truthfully that she desired it. And this woman looked proudly on her manly son, so like herself, and yet was blind enough to think that she could mold his will to hers, and tell him where to love.

She was proud of his popularity, proud of his scholastic honors, and the old name he bore, and what more natural than that he should make a brilliant marriage? But with all this deep love between mother and son, there was a shade of habitual reserve, imparted, perhaps, from her own nature to his, which barred out many little confidences that might have aroused her from this dream of security.

In the meantime he ran his college course, much as any of his young acquaintance.

She laughingly told a friend one day, that she was glad to say her boy "had not thought

about the girls yet." She was sure that when he entered society in earnest he would select some aristocratic girl for his wife, who would reflect credit on his taste and family. And so the fond mother built her palace of cards, sitting in her darkened, flower-scented chamber this spring day, while Walter and Laurie told their story to each other by the vine-shaded river-path.

Mrs. Marlowe had never quite forgiven Ruth Hargrave for marrying so far out of her station, but they had been good friends in their young days, and the survivor felt always a kindly interest in Ruth's little daughter; but the major, with his loud voice and terrible grammar, was a trying ordeal for the fastidious woman to endure for an hour. Laurie, morbidly sensitive where this dear old father of hers was concerned, divined this feeling and gradually ceased making her visits there.

Walter thought he knew the tender secret of her absence. The old doctor often looked over his spectacles and asked why she never came, but the mother said nothing. She was far indeed from suspecting a present danger,

but it was part of her plan that the intimacy between her son and the major's daughter should not survive his boyhood; and she felt that fate was playing into her hand. She thanked her good star, and kept silent, for she dreaded, as she dreaded nothing else, the stern reproach that would gather in her husband's eyes when the expression of such a feeling would sometimes escape her.

Walter came to her this day, a happy smile illumining the beauty of his face, and there was great tenderness in the way this tall boy bent down and kissed her on the forehead. He sat down beside her, took both her hands in his and told her his heart's story; told her, in his own eloquent way, how he loved the beautiful girl with all the strength of his nature, and that he could never be happy without her. "I meant to tell you this, mother," he went on, "before I spoke to her; but I saw in her pretty eyes this morning how glad she was of my success; she looked so sweet in her enthusiasm about it, that almost before I knew it I told her all."

This was true, he had meant to tell her,

but put it off, as one will an unpleasant task, as long as possible. He had expected opposition at first, for he knew the nature of his mother's plan for him; but he was not prepared for the look of anger that gathered in her eyes as she heard him. She withdrew her hands from his clasp, for the first time in his life, and folded them firmly in her lap, while she listened in silence.

Then he saw how foolish had been his hope that she would put by her ambitious dreams, when she saw how deeply his happiness was centered in Laurie. He saw, before she poke, that he would never, by all his pleading or all her love for him, be able to win her from her enmity against his marriage with Marshall McNaughton's daughter. He felt the chill of her disapproval, and his eager enthusiasm vanished; he resented it for Laurie's sake.

He paused and looked at her a moment full in the eyes; each saw the determination of the other—how like they were at that moment.

"Go on;" she spoke for the first time; her face was pale with suppressed anger.

He straightened himself in his chair, and in an altered tone told her curtly and in a few words that his choice was unchangeable; that he had hoped she would consider his happiness sufficiently to lay aside any prejudice she might have in the matter, and receive the motherless girl kindly; but, that, anyhow, his troth was plighted to Laurie and his happiness as well as his honor depended upon his keeping it—at any cost.

"You have disappointed me bitterly," was all she said as she gathered her sewing together and left the room. Such an ending to such a day! He knew what it meant; his father would be on his side, and she would submit to the inevitable and receive his wife, —he knew that; but it would be with that immutable protest in her heart and in her manner; and how could he bring that tender-hearted child to such a home?

He went out of the house with a bitter resentment in his heart against his mother; she who had been so indulgent to his every whim, and so devoted to his interest always, now in this first great need had failed him. The re-

action from his joy of the morning was horrible.

After an hour's aimless wandering in the woods he came to a decision. As his anger began to cool he reflected that he had not been very considerate, perhaps; the revelation had surprised her; he would make one more earnest effort to reconcile her, and induce her to receive Laurie kindly.

But it was as he thought; his father listened gravely to his story, and said that if he truly loved the girl, and she loved him, it was right in the sight of God, that he should marry her; but, though the mother said nothing further in protest, and even went to see Laurie and conformed to all the conventionalities of approval, Walter knew that in her heart she was embittered against his choice, and would not forgive the girl who had won her son from her. He determined that Laurie should not know of this, if it was in his power to prevent it; and trusted to fate.

It was not hard for him to hide anything from Laurie. Walter loved her; that was enough and she was too happy to question

anything. And as for the major, that any man should win his little girl was in his eyes a thing to be thankful for; it never occurred to him that there was anything that one could object to in that.

CHAPTER IV

If Marshall McNaughton had succeeded in blinding himself to the progress he had made on the downward road in C— during the past few years, his eyes were opened the morning after Laurie's revelation when he rode into town and proceeded to purchase the white dress he had promised.

His loving heart was vacillating between sympathy with her great happiness, and grief at losing her. Memories of her young mother were mingled with his thoughts of Laurie; and as he rode along the familiar road, with slackened rein, tears from the purest spring in the nature of this anomaly of a man, rose to his eyes and blotted the well-known landscape from his sight.

Old "Senora," the mare, took her head with an easy pace and brought up at "Hartley's," as the place containing the best bar-room was called. To do the major credit, he had

not intended to stop there this morning, but his thoughts were far away in other days, and so long as Senora had stopped, expecting her noonday siesta and her customary meal at the racks before the Hartley stables, he thought he would just step in and have a word with the convivial fellows sure to be gathered there.

He was not disappointed in his expectation of finding several boon companions of his former revels lounging idly about the place. Marshall McNaughton was a man of magnificent presence, more than six feet high, and though he bore the marks of years of dissipation in many ways upon him, still wore a commanding air, and created a sensation always when he entered a room. His heavy locks, considerably frosted with silver, framed a face still handsome and engaging.

He paused at the doorway, as magnificent a figure of a man as ever walked to ruin under its portal. The graceful sweep of a large felt sombrero shaded his face; and he held a heavy riding whip (merely from habit) in his hand; had a lash of one-half the weight been laid upon Senora in his sight, it would have

brought a quick and terrible reckoning with her master. He loved many men, hated a few, but his devotion to his daughter and his horse was this man's religion.

All rose and gave him the seat of honor. The clink of glasses went merrily round again, and after not "a few," but many drinks he told himself he was better able to execute the delicate commission for which he had come to town.

He did not remember that it had been quite a while since he had attempted to make a purchase in C— outside of "Hartley's," and the unstinted liberality of the proprietor there could have been read between the lines of numerous notes of hand which were piled up in the money drawer with the major's signature upon them. Some said that it was a thing that might happen whenever it so pleased this complacent creditor, for his old house and all its belongings to be put up and sold at auction any day before his eyes.

The story had already become known to the small commercial world of C—, and when he entered the principal store of the town,

and in an off-hand way ordered the handsomest and most expensive articles that could be bought—little Laurie should have the best; why not?—he was ignominiously refused them, unless he could pay for them on the spot.

To be refused credit in the South, in a town where you have lived, is an insult, deep and degrading. It came upon this man like lightning from the blue sky; it showed him with terrible vividness many things that he had been vaguely conscious of but had never forced himself to look upon before. He staggered beneath the blow. He repeated the effort in several other stores in the town, with like results; and, as the summer evening was closing in, he mounted Senora and turned towards home, cut to the heart, both by the indignity he had suffered and his failure to keep his promise to Laurie.

It was not yet quite sunset, and he could reach home before dark. He thought of how she would be watching for him, and speed down the aveune to meet him, when she fancied she heard the old mare's hoofs approaching; she would always put her little

foot on top of his in the stirrup and bring her lithe young body up to his level with a single spring; then, with her arms about him, give him a welcoming kiss.

He had always felt here was one being in the world in whose sight he held the place of honor. But his eyes were opened now and his thoughts were bitter against himself as he rode homeward in the light of the closing day. He had meant to do so well by little Laurie, and what had he done? The veil had been ruthlessly torn from his conduct, and he had to face some hard questions which his conscience was putting to him as he returned from his fruitless errand, a ruined man—he saw it at last, broken in spirit and crushed in self-respect.

"Yes," he accused himself—"I have spent her fortune, and humiliated her all these years in the eyes of C—. In the first important crisis of her life, I have not been able to make the most necessary provision for her;" and, for the first time, he felt to-day that her loving greeting would pain him; he could not bear to meet her with this feeling so strong upon

him; he halted abruptly in the road, and turned the mare's head in another direction; he made an errand of some kind in the neighborhood that would keep him until he supposed she would be safely in bed.

But that was unnecessary; for the first time his little girl had not been watching for him; she had at last found thoughts which he did not share.

He would not see her to-night; he would put it off till to-morrow, at least; it would be easier then. He lingered until the evening was far spent, and the household asleep, and then entered his house crushed and dispirited.

The question of the dress was not broached the next morning; Laurie had thought he would bring it, and felt just a little shade of disappointment, but she was too happy to worry about it this morning; Walter was coming to take her for a horseback ride, and her eyes sparkled with anticipation, when she ran into the breakfast room and gave him his morning kiss.

She seated herself opposite him with a little

air, very new and very womanly, and poured out his coffee; but she soon began to chatter away in her old childish manner, and it was some time before she noticed that he was making but a very poor pretense of eating; she noticed that his face was pale and haggard and had a depressed look altogether new to her.

She dropped her knife and fork in an instant and was at his side. "Oh! papa, dear, what makes you look so white and miserable?" the quick tears coming into her big dark eyes; "I have been happy all this time while you have been in trouble—I am a cruel, selfish thing! Dear me"—this *sotto voce*—"I reckon I have been too happy; I was afraid I was;" then, after a moment, "but I won't do it any more —no, indeed." He could not bear this; he rose abruptly and walked to the window; she stood irresolute for a moment not knowing whether to cry or not—then followed him. He had his face turned from her; he could not bear, with this new sense of humiliation upon him, to look at her. Her loving trust in him was now a reproach that touched him to the quick.

She pressed her cheek against his sleeve and waited; still he could not look at her, and tell her how low he had fallen in the eyes of his fellow men. He hoped she would not ask him about the wedding-gown until he could think of some expedient by which he could raise sufficient money to buy it. He tried hard to think of something to say to her, and could not.

"Dear daddy, are you angry with me?" came in little sobbing tones at last. This was too much—in a moment he had told her all; how he had tried, and failed, to keep his promise to her; cursing his own folly in that he had failed to do a father's part by her.

Then the smile shone through the tears,—was that all? She put her hands lovingly upon his lips, and would not let him upbraid himself. She charmed away the evil spirit in him, and even now, true to his mercurial nature, the crisis being past, his spirits began to rebound; and he ended this extraordinary interview by saying:

"But don't you spoil your pretty eyes acryin' 'bout it, pet; we'll have a bonny weddin' yet."

To make her smile, that was his aim always, and he managed to assume something of his old manner. "Who's that yonder?" he said, taking her face beween his hands and turning it toward the avenue—"canterin' up the road leadin' t'other black horse? Wonder who he's after?" His simulated cheerfulness imposed upon her, and she went off comforted, but he found the problem of ways and means harder than any he had ever undertaken before. He paced the walk until the morning sun was near its noon, and still he saw no way out of his dilemma.

Happily, however, another council was in secret session on the same subject, and it was more successful in coming to a verdict.

Aunt Viney was scraping potatoes at a high shelf just outside the kitchen door, and Uncle Ben, in his position of maid of all work, to which he had descended by slow degrees, was scouring knives on a flat rock which served for a doorstep.

" 'Pears to me, Sis' Viney, de major's got sumpin in his mind lately," he remarked. "I ain't h'yearn him swar more'n wunst or twicet

since he came from town yistiddy; an' I 'low to myself he's takin' on kase Honey be gwine away befo' long."

"Humph! chile; he got heap o' 'tings 'sides dat on his min'. I tell yer, he feel powerful bad kase he ain't got no land nor niggers nor nuffin to give her, de day what she gits mar'd, like all white folks does—all de folks what's quality. Honey, she don' kere nuffin 'bout it, kase she ain't nebber been nowhar 'mong udder gals; 'n Mas'r Walter, it don' make no diffunce to him; he say, 'Nebber min', sweetheart, all mine's gwine ter be yo's purty soon;' an' he don' let on how bad his ma feel 'bout it. I tell yer Mis' Marlowe's powerful proud—'deed she is!"

Uncle Ben finished his knives and, setting himself down in the kitchen door in the sun, fell into a deep study. After sitting silently for some time, he cleared his throat several times and finally said:

"Sis' Viney!"

"Humph?" To understand this responsive interrogation, one must have heard it.

"'Pears to me Mars' Marsh he need some money powerful bad."

"I spec' he do, Unc' Ben; but I don' know whar he's gwine to git none at." Silence again for a few minutes, then in the same tone—

"Sis' Viney."

"I hear yer, Unc' Ben;" she knew what he was going to say; it had been in her thoughts all day, too.

"Don' it 'pear to you like 'taint correspondin' like to hab niggers, when he so poor, till he caint buy no weddin' clo'es fur Honey?"

"It cert'ny do 'pear kin' o' onsuitable, Unc' Ben."

"Jes' me an' you; dat's all dat's lef', ole 'oman."

"I know it, Unc' Ben."

"Well, which one it gwine ter be, Sis'Viney —you or me?"

"It's in de Lawd's han' I reckon, Unc' Ben," was her only reply to this. She was so busy about the fire that he could not get a glimpse of her face.

"Well, I bin stud'n 'bout it powerful heap today," continued the old man, "an' I 'lows its jes' like dis; we mus'n't say nuffin' 'tall 'bout

it to Honey; fur ef she knows what wuz gwine on, she take on so, till she jus' break her heart, and ourn too; but we's jis' got to 'cide 'tween ourse'ves which one us got to go, and den we'll lay de case befo' de major. He'll cuss de nigger blue what 'poses it, fur he ain't gwine ter like de idee; but I tink, fur Honey's sake, he do mos' anyting; an' ef we's got to be sol', mought jes' as well be now, when de money do Honey some good, as fur to wait fur de sheriff, and you knows dat gwine ter happen fo' long."

This was hard sense, Aunt Viney had to admit, but how was she going to talk about any scheme that might separate her from her baby? The wisdom of the plan had been patent to her mind a long time, but as to which of them it should be, that could be seen at a glance, she thought; how could anything go on about the place, and most of all, what would Laurie do without her? She put the case thus before her "feller sarvint," but it seemed he had entrenched himself behind an argument equally as powerful.

"Well, it 'pears kin' o' *dis* way ter me," he

said; "when Honey go to lib wid de Marlowes she hab a whole passel o' niggers to wait on her; but ef ole Ben go 'way who gwine ter stay wid mas'r? an' what's gwine to cum o' Snorer? Any fool nigger—cep'n me—what cum nigh her she kick 'em higher'n a kite sho nuff; an' who gwine ter go 'long and bring mas'r home safe o' nights when he stay in town late?"

So they talked and talked, the matter getting farther and farther from a settlement, until at last it was decided to appeal to chance, the god which in his heart every darkey holds in superstitious awe but thinks may sometimes be propitiated; and accordingly an old battered "seb'n-pence" was fished up from Uncle Ben's trousers' pocket where he had long carried it for luck, and they prepared to toss for it.

Aunt Viney demurred again; the coin that was supposed to have brought luck to its owner so long would certainly do so again and she demanded fair play. This was settled, however, by his allowing her to choose sides, a privilege also supposed to bring fortune; and

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unconscious of the sublimity of their act they prepared to invoke the irrevocable fiat, for neither would have dreamed of appealing from the verdict.

Uncle Ben solemnly turned the worn bit of silver over and over in his hand and scrutinized it on both sides; it was invested with a new interest—it was to decide his fate.

With bated breath they stepped out on the little plateau under the mulberries where the grass had been worn away by the faithful feet of these two old servants, and Uncle Ben began to choose his ground; Aunt Viney looking on in awed silence. The stake for which they played was a few more years of toil and privation on the dear old place, where every homely object was a shrine at which their fond hearts worshiped; and the privilege of spending their allotted years in the service of those for whose sake they would even go, if it should be their lot, uncomplaining. Aunt Viney had chosen "heads." By tacit consent both stood silent and gazed at the familiar scene where their lives had been spent, taking in every detail with its associations of more than half a century.

Down there on the old swamp road Uncle Ben had taught "Honey" and Honey's mother to ride on horseback. Over here went the path by which he had led the old Senora to water night and morning for so many years. Over there to the west lay the fields where he had labored in the cotton rows side by side with Tuny of the lustrous eyes. Ah! those old days when cotton was king! Then the nights when the moon was full, and the dance before the cabin doors—for Tuny with the yellow skin and speaking eyes was belle of the quarters,—poor old Tuny, dead and buried long ago.

Aunt Viney looked longest towards the spot where a willow stood sentinel over some quiet graves. There lay the young "Miss," the idol of her life, where they had laid her down before the dark days came. Like a white thread over the green hill ran the track her feet had made as she led her darling's little daughter, night and morning, to her mother's grave. Then she could see the little path branch off towards another enclosure, almost invisible now to the dim old eyes, where the

faithful servants of the family rested from their toils and some of her own little pickaninnies slept their long sleep. It was their world, their all, how could they leave it?

The sun sank below the hills. The curtain was down upon the closing act, and the last of the actors must disperse. With a sigh that was almost a moan they came back to the present. The old man proceeded to toss.

"Now she's gwine!" he said in an excited whisper, and up went the coin, flashing an instant; down it came again through the leaves overhead, and lay upon the ground a few feet from them. They looked into each others' faces a moment while their hearts stood still with fear, then knelt down to read their fate.

The worn outline of head lay uppermost.

Without a word, the old fellow picked up the coin and put it in his pocket and taking his old straw hat from the ground, turned and walked away towards the stables.

" 'Fore Gawd!" was Aunt Viney's only remark, as she remained stupefied, on her knees, and looked after his retreating figure.

THE OLD MAN PROCEEDED TO TOSS.

The bitter tears shed by that fond old heart as he hid his face in the mare's silky mane and clasped his arms around her neck, none but "Snorer" knew, and she could never tell.

CHAPTER V

The major received the old darkey's proposition much as Uncle Ben had expected; nor was the ultimate result other than that he had foreseen. Here was another blow to that pride to which until two days ago the master had held so firmly. This man had known for a long time that he was giving ground, though he had parried the strokes of his enemy, circumstances, desperately, and refused to admit to himself that he was being beaten; but now, by a little turn of the blade, he was disarmed, and after his experience in town that day he had no heart to resist longer.

He listened to the old negro's words; and low as it made him seem in his own sight, this proposition, which a week ago he would have scorned, showed him an outlet from the wall of difficulties that seemed closing around him; and swearing at first that he would never listen, he surrendered to it at last.

This thought of selling the old negro, who was part of the inheritance left to Laurie by her mother, lowered him more in his own eyes than any act of his erratic life which had made it necessary; and yet the motive which actuated him in it arose from the purest instinct of his nature—his passionate love for his little daughter. What imperfect, what unjust judges of ourselves we are, after all!

It was a hard task to bring himself to consent to this, the only available means that he could see for raising even the small sum of money necessary to provide for his Laurie's wedding, but when it was decided, it gave him some little feeling of pleasure to think she would not be humiliated, anyway. She should have the prettiest white dress in the town, and what was one more pang of self-reproach, one more bitter memory added to his long account, compared to the mortification and disappointment he had felt was in store for her? After all he thanked God it was old Ben's thought not his; and he took a drink of brandy twice the usual size.

To keep up appearances for the little one's sake until she was honorably married, that was all he asked; beyond that, with a sort of fatal premonition, he would not look.

He made himself no idle promise of reformation in his ways; he knew he would not change for the better now. There was a recklessness added to his former hilarity, which no one, perhaps, but the two old darkies, noticed; who were thankful when they saw it that their darling was provided for.

Thus the drama swept on to its *denouement* with its deep under-currents of love, duty, sacrifice, bearing on to its destination the little rose-colored sail that carried Laurie "and her fortune." The girl, in the meantime, pure, and loving even to the old trees under which she had played, lived unconscious of the dark shape that waited on her footsteps. Walter loved her—that was enough.

She had quite made up her mind that she did not want the new dress; she had been selfish, she told herself, to distress poor "daddy" about it. There was still a remnant of old finery in a chest in the attic which

would do very well; Aunt Viney and she would rip off the lace, and with its help readorn the remains of some fabric which had seen previous service. What did it matter? Had not Walter said it made no difference? It had been no new thing for her father to promise her the most preposterous things in all good faith and forget the circumstance entirely; she hoped it would be so now, and seeing his embarrassments, resolved to say nothing more about the matter.

On the other hand, he avoided the topic religiously and trembled for fear she should suspect the plot between old Ben and himself, and in her loving, impulsive way put an end to it.

She had risen early one morning and, ensconced in her favorite position, was working industriously on a sketch which had occupied much of her time of late when Walter was not by; it was a sketch of this spot so dear to the lovers' hearts, and she intended it as a parting gift to her father. Through unforeseen events the work was never completed and the world has missed the opportunity of pass-

ing on its merits. It was supposed by many to be a representation of an Arctic explorer's fleet under full sail

But what did it matter? Nature was in its springtide on the earth, and in her heart, what did she want from art? Leave that great consoler for the dear faded old mam'selle for whom youth, beauty and love, are over. How could she work on such a morning with all the glad sights and sounds of summer claiming her eyes and ears? It was indeed a rarely beautiful spot, this trysting place; the water there was clearer and the shade more dense and cool than in any other place in all the world, they thought; and to one of them afterwards, in great misery, the scene came out on the dark ground of the present with heart-breaking vividness.

Gradually the charm of the scene began to work upon her, the book slid from her lap and the old reverie took empire in her thought again.

There was just one little canker spot in the flower of her great joy; she suspected that Walter had some trouble upon his mind, but

she had not been able to fathom it; he had come to her looking pale and anxious sometimes of late, but always laughed her questions away. He could not bear that she should know the state of his mother's feeling towards her. He had wounded her in her most sensitive spot, her ambition for him. It was a source of great pain to Marlowe, for he loved this handsome, stately mother with a deep devotion.

Poor little Laurie had never felt comfortable in his mother's presence and instinctively shrank from the ceremonious visits of the elder woman; it was not hard therefore to deceive her in the matter and when Walter told her that he wished the engagement kept secret for awhile, and the wedding to be a private one, she thought it was out of consideration for her own circumstances, and gratefully acquiesced. He felt now that he had been precipitate in asking her to marry him on his graduation day; he should have won his mother first.

He loved Laurie too dearly, however, to risk wounding her by a suggestion of delay.

In the meantime, he guarded the affair from the knowledge of his classmates, who knew that he had always been friends with the major's pretty daughter but suspected nothing more. As for Laurie—a Southern girl keeps her love secrets well. He clung still to a gossamer thread of hope that his mother would consent to receive his wife kindly. He knew that she was prejudiced; that she visited the sins of the father upon the child; and there were moments when he fought against a dull feeling, almost of hatred of this man who had dragged his daughter from the position that should have been hers, and thus stood between him and his perfect happiness. It was this feeling that clouded his brow sometimes when he saw how tenderly devoted she was to the old father; but he could not breathe a word of it to her; she would have resented it deeply, he knew.

And thus the days passed on until Marlowe's graduation was but a few weeks off. The major had kissed his daughter more fondly than ever that morning, and started to town as usual; but when his foot was in the stirrup,

he stopped, and turning to her again patted her on the head, and taking her under the chin in a playful way, raised her face to his and looked long and lovingly into her eyes. Yes, it was a beautiful face, all dimpled with smiles now, for she was happy. Her father seemed more like his old self this morning, his depression seemed banished by magic.

True, he had not done his duty by his daughter, as the world said, this self-indulgent, easy-going man; he had squandered the fortune which should have been hers, but he was making for her sake to-day a sacrifice of his pride, and he alone knew what it cost him. To voluntarily sell an old negro long resident on the place, was an act which brought much hard criticism generally on the master.

He mounted, and old Senora was soon out of sight for she could travel well still. He turned at the last bend in the road and waved his hand to her; she watched him out of sight. In the last glimpse she had of him, he was looking back at her again. With all his delinquencies toward her, Laurie knew that her father had loved her well. It was this knowl-

edge that made her troubles, when they came, so much harder to bear. It was Saturday, and she knew Walter would come soon; her mind was full of little rose-colored plans for the future.

Presently she saw, first the dog, then the master, coming toward the rendezvous. That was the way he always came, sometimes with a Virgil sticking out of his pocket, sometimes with a gun over his shoulder, according to which proved at the time the best excuse for his ramble.

Walter proposed a picnic and a gipsy fire under the trees, and all went merrily until he innocently remarked that it was a sort of irregular sale day in the town and as his father had gone in early, and his mother was visiting friends some miles away, he was free to spend his day with her. He was bent down in a comical effort to blow some sticks into a blaze. Struck by her sudden silence, he looked up at her, fanning the air wildly with his hat to get the smoke from before his eyes. She was standing pale and motionless; an agony of fear had seized her heart.

He sprang up in an instant and put his arm around her. "What is it, darling?" he asked anxiously. The look on her face alarmed him; she looked at him with an expression he had never seen on her face before. "Oh, Walter," she said solemnly, earnestly, laying one hand upon his arm, "I would not speak of this to any one but you; you have just reminded me that this is a sale-day in town, and I know my poor father will meet those terrible men who make him drink. It frightens me so, to think of his coming home late at night alone when he has been drinking. I have no one to go to but you—dear Walter, won't you go and stand by him and bring him home safely for my sake? Sometimes I have been able to keep him at home on these terrible sale-days, but I was so happy this time I did not remember and now I have let him go."

Here the great eyes filled with tears, and she clung to him pitifully. She looked so beautiful, so pure and sweet in her distress for this erring father, that all that was finest, all that was best, in this generous, but far

from perfect young man arose to meet her trust and fulfill it.

"I will go, dear," he said softly, drawing his arms closer about her; "but don't cry, Laurie; I can't bear that, indeed I can't."

"But oh, Walter, won't you go now, this moment? He is so good and yielding, they will make him drink again, I know it."

"I will go at once," he answered her proudly, a bright light flashing from his eyes, "and I will convince him that I am his friend for your sake, and one to whom he can entrust you. Don't worry about it any more, dear, for I am going to be your protector now. Look up, Laurie"—for she had hidden her face in shame and sorrow on his shoulder—"and smile at me, and say you trust me." She did smile—a little tremulous smile through her tears—and he folded her to his heart and kissed her passionately again and again. She had never seemed so dear to him as now, when she appealed to him for help.

"And now, darling, that is better," he said after a little, for he knew that to do any good he must be gone. "I'll be the oak and you

be the ivy, eh? Never fear; I will be with him, and it will be all right."

"Oh, Walter, if you will be his friend, I will never doubt that you love me."

"Then farewell, my lady fair, I go to do thy bidding," he said laughing, and dropped upon one knee kissing her hand to carry out his knight errant part. She was looking quite content again, and smiled upon him. Walter was so strong and manly—Walter loved her so truly! what had she to fear now?

"But don't you go anywhere, nor speak to any one else, nor do anything all day, but think about me, or I'll consider myself cheated," he called back to her. "Remember I only leave you to look after your father—our father, I mean." What would he not mean to please her?

"Leave Carlo to keep me company then," she said; "he often comes and spends the whole day with me when you are away—don't you, Carlo?" The dog, who was running from one to the other in doubt which way his duty lay, wagged his tail in complete acquiescence of anything, he did not care what.

"All right," said Walter, looking at Carlo and waving his hand slightly toward Laurie; meaning that she was in his charge until the master should return; "you can hold him as a hostage for the safe return of your father; he is the dearest thing I could leave you." He patted the beautiful creature on the head and went slowly from them. He returned homeward by the river-path and in less than a half hour was on horseback and on his way to C—.

He longed to do this little service for the girl he loved as ardently as any belted knight ever longed to display his lady's colors on the battle field.

She heard the distant sound of his horse's flying feet and now he was gone; just as the other had gone from her that day, with a kiss upon her forehead and fond words upon his lips.

CHAPTER VI

The public square in the town of C— presented a busy appearance on this Saturday afternoon in June, 1856.

The auction crier was standing on a platform and the sales of the day had just drawn to a close, when Marlowe rode up on horseback and halted on the outskirts of the crowd. Presuming that the object of his search would be found here, he dismounted and threw his bridle to a little black urchin who came up, with a flash of white teeth revealed in a broad grin at the prospect of a lucrative job, and entered the throng.

He was surprised to find the major not there, but an event had just then transpired which put his errand out of his mind for the moment. The epidemic of merriment showed that something unusual had occurred. Marlowe inquired of a townsman what the matter was, and as soon as the fellow could command

his voice he told him that "that — cuss Hank Staples had just bought a nigger," and lapsed into his paroxysms of laughter again. Just then he spied old Ben sitting disconsolately on a bench in the background shaking his head and talking to himself. It was he who had been sold to Hank Staples.

Marlowe could not understand it; after a few words with the auctioneer, he crossed over to the old darkey and laid a hand kindly upon his shoulder.

Uncle Ben raised his head, and a look of rapture came into his eyes when he saw who it was. Walter had come to be associated with his own folks in the old fellow's mind.

"Glory to Gawd! am dat you, Mas'r Walter?" he cried, and poured out the tale of his woe; he belonged "to the trash." Walter stood there and heard the whole pitiful story rehearsed; the desperate circumstances of the McNaughtons, this last resource to which they had been driven; it revealed a depth of necessity of which even he had been entirely ignorant. He was not surprised then that the major had absented himself from the scene.

He wished that he had been a little earlier, he would have bought the old negro at almost any price; how pleasant it would have been to tell Laurie that her old Ben would still be hers; for he knew how she would take his loss to heart. He was meditating a plan by which he might still treat with Mr. Staples and buy him back.

It would cost him something though to approach the despised upstart in an amiable way. The story had more than once reached his ears, that, presuming on his convivial relationship with the major, the parasite had dared lift his eyes to the major's daughter. To a certain side of Marshall McNaughton's nature Hank Staples appealed, but it was the worst side; and he would sooner have seen his little girl in her grave than that the fellow should ever say a familiar word to her. The idea simply never occurred to him that such a thing could be thought of; and Hank, in the meantime, had often spoken of her as his sweetheart. Nothing but his respect for her name had kept Marlowe s hand from the fellow's collar many times when that name had

been, in the most casual way, upon his lips.

The young man was standing beside Uncle Ben, meditating upon the affair, with anything but an amiable expression of face, when it was proposed that all should adjourn to the nearest bar-room, which proved to be "Hartley's."

"Hartley's" was a place of that type at which the two classes, the respectable commoner and the upper ten, made their nearest approach to affiliation. The chasm that divided them irrevocably, was narrower here than elsewhere, and although one seldom stepped from the one side to the other, they would often here shake hands across it.

It is obvious what an attraction such a place would possess for the younger men of the town; and it became, consequently the *bete noir* of the heads of the college of S—, which was situated in the suburbs and under whose walls assembled daily the scions of the best families in the state. The most strenuous rules were fixed against the students resorting thither at all, but these soon became Draconian laws, too hard to be fulfilled. So, the

president and the faculty, though they still considered "Hartley's" a thorn in the flesh, were forced to compromise the matter, and the older fellows knew that a Saturday evening spent in that convivial company would not be brought up against them, if their studies were not interfered with in consequence.

It was already getting toward evening when Marlowe entered; he had expected to meet his companions there in the evening, and he made it a point to avoid the appearance of his real errand. A brilliant company had already assembled, and there, surrounded by an admiring group, sat the major talking his noisiest. The young man, who watched him to-night with a new interest, thought that he had purposely worked himself into this state of feverish hilarity for a purpose; at any rate, he had fully embarked on a sea of glory in which he promised to be submerged before long; that was clear.

Marlowe greeted him casually and turned to where some friends were talking at an open window, and joined them; still keeping an

unobserved espionage upon him, however. To urge him to return home, would have been, at this juncture, like oil to the flames, he reflected, and so the only thing was, simply, to keep him in sight; in that way he could at least fulfill his promise to Laurie, and take him home safe—if not sober.

A reinforcement to the merry party soon arrived in a detachment of the college boys off for their Saturday holiday. They were all classmates of Marlowe's, and would graduate in a few weeks. It was understood that, in a way, this would be their last night's fun together; they would disperse after commencement to their homes in various parts of the Southern states.

They were the members of an organization connected with their college, similar, I suppose, to those that exist in all such institutions. The object being simply to have fun, as a relief from the routine of study; and banded together in order to accomplish that end more effectually.

It began in the same way as so many of those secret societies in the South, which in

war time, and in the "reconstruction" period, assumed so much importance in the eyes of the new government—namely, in a project to enjoy themselves, and, by a pledge of mutual support, to protect themselves, in some measure, from the chastisement of the faculty.

This particular clan had been organized several years before by a senior class, and handed down to each succeeding one, until it had grown to be a time-honored institution among the students. It was considered a mark of distinction for a stranger to be admitted; for the very essence of the thing depended upon a certain point of honor.

It was stipulated in the initiation formula that each member should pledge his most sacred honor to maintain a strict secrecy concerning anything that might occur when they were on any escapade together. If any member should be charged with a misdemeanor, he was to keep silent, whether innocent or guilty, and the others to do likewise, so as to baffle detection of the culprit. Nothing more was apprehended than a breach of college rules and the vengeance of the faculty.

Hitherto, the plan had been eminently successful, and it was the proud boast of the order that not a man had ever been induced, under any hard circumstances, to break the oath; one young fellow even suffered expulsion from college, when suspicion had fallen upon him, rather than speak on a particular occasion; and he was promptly canonized in the memory of the order.

For several days after the idea of this new club was conceived, the students had assumed a very promising attitude of studiousness over the open pages of their Horace and their Euclid, while they were racking their brains to find a name which would be both original and applicable. At last one night when lights were out, and the devotees of learning were supposed to be resting after their arduous tasks, one bright genius of the class announced that he "had it!" the clan should be called the "Order of the Mid-knights," a name significant of the chivalrous intentions of the order, and, also, of the hour at which they would generally hold their seances. This inspiration was hailed with as much enthusi-

asm as was compatible with the necessity of speaking under their breath, and the title was adopted.

The management of the college had made many efforts to disband the "M. K's," hoping as each succeeding class graduated and left the institution, it would be prevented from entering again; but all to no avail; the first thing they knew, the prize scholars of the class would be seen with the irrepressible insignia, the magical "M. K.", engraved on ring and stud.

One president, a Dr. Williams, had put his hand to the plow and endeavored to root out the evil; an evil the more formidable in that this oath of secrecy had grown through successive generations to be considered a sacred trust, a sort of pledge of honor, that any man would have considered it dire disgrace to violate; he threatened to expel from the college every young man refusing to abandon the order. The result was that almost the entire class announced their intention to leave. And so the worthy president found that his constituency would not back him up. He offered

his resignation in dignified umbrage; the trustees accepted it and the students remained. So the matter stood when the class of Walter Marlowe—the class of 1856—entered on its career, and never had the "M. K's" promised to be more troublesome. Young Harry Napier —the son of that Judge Napier who now sat upon the bench of the supreme court of Georgia, was chosen chief for the year; and it was generally expected that the escapades of the class would reach their maximum under his reign. He and Marlowe were the best of friends, and it was pleasant to see the smile that lit up this charming young fellow's face when he saw Walter, on entering Hartley's with a half dozen other students and "M. K's."

Walter was the Beauclerc of the class, and they all were proud of him; he knew that Harry had been far more delighted when the honors of the year fell to his friend than if he had won them himself; in fact, he would have been surprised if any one had suspected him of wishing for them; said he did not go in for that sort of thing himself. This mad-

cap had always said that Marlowe was his better self—no one else had ever exercised so much influence over him. He was in his lightest, merriest mood this evening, and rallied Walter on his sober looks

Pretty soon he discovered the major; and nothing ever pleased him quite so much as to listen to the witty stories and Mexican reminiscences that prevailed when the veteran was in the humor for them. The young fellow's inimitable laugh rang out every now and then, and Walter knew that both the orator and the listener were taking more wine than was customary among the students.

Soon, however, the scene changed; the major stopped short and muttered something under his breath; it sounded like a curse, but Walter could not hear the words. Then in walked Hank Staples—who had never been countenanced here but under Major McNaughton's wing,—with Uncle Ben at his heels. He evidently felt a right to make free among gentlemen because he had "bought a nigger."

The situation dawned upon the old slave's former master at once, and he sat staring at

the new-comers in a stupefied way, his brow contracted into a heavy frown, and the half emptied glass still grasped in his hand; but instantly on observing that he was attracting attention, he turned the conversation again into its former channel. He would not look in the old negro's direction, and he drank more heavily and more recklessly after that. The conversation soon became general, and he soon lost all sense of soreness in the general conviviality—apparently.

Mr. Hank Staples was a conspicuous member of that old branch of the population in the South so well known as the "po' white trash," a grade from which a man rarely, if ever, emerged; however, as I say, he had certain characteristics which gave him the *entree* to Hartley's, where, for the time being, he made more or less free with his acquaintances. Though ten years younger he had "fit long side o' Major McNaughton in the Mexican wah;" and somehow the major had always been his friend.

He was also something of a wag and told a good story. So, like the king's jester of "ye

olden time," he was privileged to say, virtually, whatever he pleased at the expense of any one present; no self-respecting man would resent it, unless the offense should be very marked. He gained a precarious living, one scarcely knew how, consequently, the surprise of all when he stepped up and bid a price for the old negro.

One of the company evidently had not digested the phenomenon yet, for, during a little lull in the cross-fire which was kept up between Mr. Staples and different members of the company, he broke in with, "Say, Hank! what the devil did you buy that old nigger for anyhow? He'll die on your hands before Christmas."

"Well, that's just what I bought him for," replied Hank with a chuckle.

"What!" exclaimed the chorus, "what does the fool mean by that?"

"Wall, it's jest this way, gentlemen," continued he, nothing abashed, "you see I haven't ever owned a nigger, and a man caint git inter good 'ciety till he has niggers o' some sort."

"That's so, Hank," said some one after the general outburst had subsided, "you struck the keynote then, but what'll you do when the old fellow dies—and you won't have either nigger or your money?"

"Wall, now, I reck'n that's jest what I'm layin' fur, gentlemen. I'm goin' to engage a place for him in the nigger graveyard here in town and have him buried by the Meth'dis chache when he dies; you've allus been a good Meth'dis hain't you, Unc' Ben?" he called over his shoulder.

"Yes, sah! I is, bress Gawd!" responded the old darkey, from his place in the rear of the party, the weary look on his face brightening a little at the thought of the posthumous honors that awaited him.

"Well, then, yer see," continued Mr. Staples, "when Unc' Ben dies, I'm agoin' to have him buried in town, and have the chache bells tolled fur his funeral; and when the people is all settin' 'roun' the squar' some un'll say, 'Hello! who's that gittin' buried? I hain't h'yearn o' nobody's dyin'.' Then some un else'll say in a kind o' off-hand way: 'Oh!

that's one o' Mr. Hank Staples' niggers,' so, you see, I'll be a durned aristocrat arter that." They all laughed heartily at this unique plan, Uncle Ben (who, it must be confessed, was cheering up under the influence of Bourbon and sugar,) heartiest of all. Harry Napier thought the joke deserved recognition, and they all had their glasses refilled. After that Mr. Staples—slave-holder, and aristocrat elect, began a sparring match with the major on old Mexican days, and they prevailed upon him (the major)—who had a grand voice—to sing them a song. He sang with fine effect:

"The guns had hushed their thunder,
The drums in silence lay;
When came the senorita,
The maid of Monterey," etc.

During the singing, Uncle Ben was worked up into an ecstasy by the melody, and after swaying from side to side for a minute or two began also, singing a song in the same key, but with a widely different import from the other:

"A charge to keep I has,
A God to glorify;
A nebber dyin' soul to sabe,
And fit her fur de sky."

The occurrence did not harmonize with the convivial scene. A dead silence followed the voice. Many felt the unconscious rebuke.

"Shut up, you old black Meth'dis!" cried Hank Staples, "or I'll knock yer two eyes inter one."

"I wish yer would," whined Uncle Ben, "an' knock my brains out too; fur I heap ruther be dead than ter b'long to you. I'se got a nebber dyin' soul as good as yourn an' I'se hones' an' squar'; an' I kin read de Bible, and say de Lawd's prar, an' dat's more'n you kin do, if you is my marster." Uncle Ben's heart prompted the thought; Bourbon and sugar spoke the words. Hank Staples struck him on the mouth, but if he had intended to repeat the blow he could not, for he was seized by Marlowe, and was on the floor in an instant.

"You dare to strike that old man, you low-lived cur!" he muttered between his clenched teeth, "and you will have to deal with me."

The young man's hand was at his throat, and his knee on the pigeon-breast of the "trash." It was the last touch to his long pent

animosity, and before he knew it, his temper took fire. He knew how the old negro was loved by Laurie, and that blow was too much.

Major McNaughton had, also, half arisen from his chair, his brow dark and threatening; but Marlowe had no sooner given way to his anger than he felt the imprudence of it; perhaps he felt a little ashamed to attack anything so low and mean; and he thought also that, with all his brutality, the fellow had once done a great service to Laurie's father, and was befriended by him.

"What shall I do with him, gentlemen?" he said, "you all saw that dastardly act; he isn't worth killing."

"Git up," said the major curtly; and, strangely enough, Marlowe arose, and spurning the prostrate figure slightly with his foot, let him go.

"Gentlemen," said the young fellow, turning to the others, "you all know that my honored father is a preacher of the gospel, and has spent his life in the service of the church; the hymn that old man began to sing was always a favorite of his, and no one shall in-

sult that old negro or pour contempt on that hymn, unless he first puts me beyond the power of hearing him."

"You are right," several voices said.

The major looked silently on while the young fellow was speaking. "Walter," he said, "come here; you see that old man; he has not many years to live, maybe, but take him yourself—your father won't object to anything you do, he is a good man and a holy one—and let him spend his last years in peace."

"I will do that gladly," responded Marlowe, "I was going to propose it myself."

The plan was applauded by all. "That will suit all round," said some one.

"Wall, it won't suit me," said Hank Staples, "fur I hain't agoin' to sell him."

"Yes, you will!" thundered the major. "Yes, you will," echoed the crowd. "And if you don't agree," continued the major, incensed at last against his parasite, "you'll never set foot in my house agin, an' I'm the only friend you've got in the world, you know that d— well."

"You've got your title to aristocracy, you idiot!" suggested some one, "now's your chance to get your money back besides."

This argument seemed to find a lodgment in his alleged mind, or, perhaps, he was not willing to break with Laurie's father, and so, after a little, he gave a half reluctant acquiescence to the plan.

"How do you like the idea, Uncle Ben?" asked Harry Napier, who was chosen, on the strength of being the judge's son, to preside over the sale.

"Amen! Amen! I likes it powerful;" reponded Ben; "Mas'r Walter nex' 'ting to my own folks, an' I likes to git a chance to lib wid de good ole doctor."

"Then," said Napier laughing, "Uncle Ben must stand upon the bench over there and knock himself down to the highest bidder. Never mind, Mr. Staples," he continued, seeing the rather crestfallen look of the "trash," "we will run up the bids until Marlowe pays you a good price for your property." His fun-loving spirit hailed the sport of the thing, but he was too kind at heart to willingly see any

creature suffer for it. His faults—and they were many—were the faults of a rash temper, never deliberate cruelty. Under all his wild ways he had a heart that would not take pleasure in the suffering of anything that lived.

Uncle Ben took his stand on the bench, highly amused, but equal to the occasion. "Heah I stan', gentlemen," he began; "goin,' goin,' goin,' to de highest bidder; how much is I offered fur dis good 'telligent nigger? He's hones' an' squar' an' he's got a heap o'sense, an' he'll make a good han' to ten' to de do', an' carry 'roun' passels, an' mebbe, sometime, when dey ain't got nobody else he kin preach to de niggers 'bout de dangers ob de hen-roos', an' de watermillion patch; how much is I offered fur dis good valuable nigger?"

Marlowe bid the price Staples had paid previously.

"Gone!" said Uncle Ben, dismounting, "de nigger is yourn."

"Hold on," said young Napier, the judge, "that isn't legal and just to the owner; you can't knock yourself down on one bid; you must wait for the second, at least."

"How much is I offered fur dis fine ole nigger?" continued that individual, getting just a little anxious now as to his fate.

Some one else made a bid for the fun of the thing, and Marlowe made a still higher one.

"Is dat s'ficient?" inquired Uncle Ben.

"Yes," explained Napier, "but don't close the sale too quick, give the buyers a chance."

"All right," said Uncle Ben, "but if de right pusson don't bid de highes' price dis auction ain't gwine ter close till to-morrer mornin'."

There were no more bids, and he announced:

"I'm goin,' goin,' gone to Mr. Marlowe fur de highes' bid, and cheap at half de money." Uncle Ben was henceforth "one o' dem stuck up Marlowe niggers," whom Aunt Viney couldn't get along with "nohow."

CHAPTER VII

The hours wore on, and the twilight deepened into night—still the revelry continued.

Uncle Ben had been seated in a farmer's wagon, and consigned to the Rev. Duncan Marlowe without any written explanation; leaving him to make the best terms he could with the kind-hearted clergyman.

The students of every college have their peculiar way of having fun. Those of the S— college, the "M. K's," found their highest enjoyment in forming themselves into a marauding party and turning the town topsy-turvy on Saturday nights, so that the long-suffering citizens, on the morrow, would wonder if an earthquake had visited the place during the night or set them to doubting that they, themselves, were in a rational state of mind.

Walter Marlowe astounded them all this

night by refusing to go with them, as he wished to return home with the major; but it was voted that the major should join the party. Then came a difficulty; the major, in his capricious mood, insisted that Hank Staples should go wherever he went; so the situation was, plainly, to either admit him or lose the major, and, consequently, Marlowe; so they chose the former course. Harry Napier insisted that both the new-comers should take the oath of the "M. K's."

He read it over and they subscribed to it, the oath referring to the one night only; it did not admit them into the order at all; that required an elaborate formula. This was the oath:

"In the name of heaven, and in the presence of you my companions, I do solemnly swear that I will never reveal the secrets of this night's work so long as I shall live, so help me God!"

And these fatal words they repeated because, in their blindness, they loved the exaggeration—the solemn tone of them;—idle young fellows who had nothing else to do.

The major, who was wildly hilarious when his changeable mood shifted in that direction, said he considered having fun the inalienable right of all young men at college.

"I remember," said the major, "about ten years ago, when the Jinkins boys was in the 'M. K's.' One of 'em is the smartest lawyer in the state now, and stands a good chance of bein' governor; Clodious Jinkins—'Clod,' as they used to call him—was head o'the clan just as you are now, Mr. Napier. Well, one Saturday night jest before commencement—like it is now—them boys went out to have a good time, and, glory! didn't they make this old town lively, for a few days! Sunday mornin' come, and the folks all got up and commenced to git ready for church. The parson, who had been pretty hard on the S— boys in his sermon, had on his best clothes and was jest washed and shaved and started out for a mornin' walk; when he lifted the latch, his hands was stuck fast with tar, ha! ha! and there wasn't no soap in his house that could take it off before church time. Nearly all the sign-boards in town was turned

upside down; the front steps of the hotel was oiled so slick that everybody that came out set down before they got invited to, and went to the ground like boys on a cellar door. On the door of the old jail up there was stickin' the placard from the new hotel sayin' 'handsome new lodgin's fitted up for guests, and all the delicacies of the season without extra charge.'

"The old president had just been removed because he was too strict with the boys, though he didn't do nuthin' but enforce the rules as he found 'em; but, you see, it wouldn't do to let the institution git unpopular; so they put another man in his place; and the Saturday which I was speakin' about, the boys burned him in effigy—so to speak. In the middle of the public square, there is where they made his grave; and Sunday mornin' as the folks went to church, they saw a fresh mound o' earth and a white painted board at the head of it on which was wrote the follow'in':

"Sacred to the memory of
President Williams,
who was killed by the accidental discharge of
his duty.

"That struck me as bein' pretty funny, as well as havin' a kind of rebuke to the trustees down in the heart of it. Well, I tell you they didn't leave no stone unturned to find out the feller what wrote that. They fell on one young man and thought by threatenin' to expel him and disgrace him, they'd make him speak, and tell who'd done it; but they didn't and the poor fellow was turned out in a shameful way. 'Twas pretty hard on him, 'specially as most people thought 'twant him 'tall; but that was better than breakin' that oath what's been kept by so many men; for I reckon a feller wouldn't hardly hold up his head here in C— if he'd broke the oath of the 'M. K's,'—you know how it is yourselves; it's been kept so long that it's got to be a sort of feelin' amongst you that it must be kep' anyhow, eh?

"Well, that mornin' I jes' went on, laughin' fit to kill myself, when I spied the head of 'Mose,' my old mule, stickin' out o' the second story winder o' the court-house. He was blind, most, and would go anywhere they led him, an' there he was that peaceful Sun-

day mornin' stickin' his head out o' the winder, all ring-streaked and striped, from his head to his tail, like unto a zebry in the circus. That was the trick they played on me; but I didn't git mad, no, not a whit; I believe in the boys havin' fun."

It was agreed by the students that the major was a trump; and they set their wits to work to devise some mischief to eclipse, if possible, even the record of the Jinkenses.

The major said: "I know you boys don't mean no harm, and if anybody interferes with you jest refer 'em to us, eh, Hank?"

"Thar's whar you are solid, maje," replied Mr. Staples; "we stuck together at 'Cherry Gordy,' an' 'Buner Vistir,' and I reckon we kin stick to the boys through a little frolic like this."

Some one proposed, as they were leaving Hartley's, to drink Mr. Staples' health after such a chivalrous speech; but Hank, forgetting his caution in his delight at being so well into the major's good graces again, said: "No, gentlemen, ef you want to honor me, drink to Laurie McNaughton, the gal what I love best."

And again, for the second time that night, Marlowe was upon him. He spoke in an undertone so that only a few heard him. "You impertinent scoundrel!" he said, (trembling in the effort to speak low and avoid attracting the general attention) "if you speak her name in my presence again, I'll whip you until you are half dead."

"Good for you, Hank!" said the major, who alone understood it all; "you're gettin' too d— impudent lately; keep in your place hereafter and don't you dare to say them words again—d'ye hear?"

Then the marauders started on their rounds, the major having many a laugh at the ludicrous things they did; but Hank Staples stood aside, sullenly muttering between his teeth: "Go ahead and have your fun now, yer stuck-up swells! my turn'll come one o' these days."

They had fun to their hearts' content; but as the town clock stuck two, the major suddenly grew tired of it all, and said he was going home; and Walter could not be dissuaded from his purpose to accompany him. He had arrived too late to prevent the degrada-

tion that Laurie had feared; but he would do all he could—he would at least see that he returned to his home in safety. So the whole party agreed to escort them also. This arranged, they started on their journey in great glee; there were, besides Major McNaughton and Hank Staples, six of the students; all the five were to graduate with Marlowe in a few weeks.

They answered, at roll call, to the names of Arthur Dalton, Ernest Caldwell, Randolph King, Lewis Holbrook, Walter Marlowe and Harry Napier. With the exception of Staples, they were all well mounted. The old Senora, wonderful, for one of her great age, showed to no disadvantage among the array of magnificent animals, but held her own nobly. Harry Napier rode his famous coal-black mare.

Harry Napier the peerless! How long and how well the people remembered him—erect, and lithe of limb—they said he had the darkest blue eyes they ever saw, and hair of a rich chestnut brown, thrown back from his forehead and falling in heavy clusters about his

neck. He was a stranger to fear, malice and meanness, and without an enemy in the world. Yet he was the outlaw of the neighborhood. They said, too, that they had seen him do such deeds of foolhardiness, and come through them, that they had come almost to think him invincible to harm.

His father, the judge, who, in his heart, every one knew idolized the boy, often sentenced him to be locked up over night for some disturbance of the peace; but it always so happened that no constable could be found able to execute the order. There was not one of them who would not have abused his office, to some extent, for love of the wild, but generous-hearted young fellow. He was the leading spirit to-night.

Marlowe, noticing him carefully, thought he had taken more wine than usual; in fact Marlowe himself was the only one in the party exempt from the same charge. He tried to conceal from the major that he was acting according to a promise made to Laurie; he knew the father well enough to feel sure that he would resent the idea of surveillance; but

still he kept close to him. The major would break out into a most hilarious manner occasionally, but Marlowe, who watched him closely also, could not escape the impression that the greater part of it was forced; he was trying to drown unpleasant thoughts, evidently, but the experiences of the day had left a sore spot very near the surface, and woe to the hand that should touch it!

Their way lay across a small river which, at certain places, could be safely forded. Old "Senora," the mare, had crossed it and carried her master safely over, a thousand times; but there were certain inequalities in the bed of the river which were to be carefully avoided and, at a little distance from the ford, there were several deep holes, supposed to be too well known to require a mark. The old mare herself, would have known how to pick her way safely across, but she had never crossed it in such company before.

The mad cavalcade dashed in without a moment's hesitation, Marlowe riding close to the major,—and in a few minutes they were climbing the bank on the other side—all but

two. Senora had gotten into the treacherous pitfalls and lost her footing; she fell, precipitating her rider into the water. Marlowe shouted to the others to stop, and in a very few minutes they got the major ashore, thoroughly soaked, thoroughly angry, and swearing like a trooper for his horse. But the faithful creature was fast getting beyond help. Below the ford there was a fall in the river, and being badly hurt and unable to swim she went swiftly towards it.

The night was dark, and her master dazed and maddened by the brandy he had drunk.

"Where is my horse?" he shouted. "Bring me my horse, you scoundrels!" A horrible fear enraged him.

"Senora, my girl!" he called to her, and started towards the ford again. The mare, now near the fall, and plunging helplessly, answered him in a wild shrieking neigh. Have you ever heard the cry of a drowning horse? Those who have, pray that they may never hear it again. Her master realized that she was going to her death; with a deep curse, he staggered forward in a mad impulse to

save her. This would have been suicide; few swimmers, in best condition, could have withstood the strong current just above the fall.

Marlowe had done his best; two strong arms went round the major's waist and held him back. He struggled desperately to loosen the grasp, now thoroughly angry, but it was firm as iron. His idolized horse—his darling Senora—was dying before his eyes, and he could not stir to her rescue. In the brief instant in which he heard her terrible neighing, and stood there, pinioned, past scenes arose before his eyes with the swiftness of thought—the bloody battles of Mexico through which the gallant mare had borne him, answering like a child to each touch, each word; all the thrilling scenes of danger when her fleet limbs had brought him with a speed like the wind; now the noble beauty—next to Laurie, the pride of his heart—was struggling in the dark water, and he stood there helpless.

"Let me go!" he shouted once more, with a terrible oath, but the others gathered around him and held him back; they knew it would be death to him if they let him go.

Then, as their eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness down the stream, they saw her, with a convulsive effort to gain a footing, go over the rocks.

That was the end; the death scream, as the waters swept her over, struck horror to the heart of every man on the bank. When her master saw that she was gone he turned upon the men who had held him, with the rage of a tiger in his motions.

"See, you have killed her!" he shouted. "You scoundrels! now let me go!" He was mad with conflicting emotions; in a moment he had wrenched himself free, and struck the young man who had held him heavily across the face with the riding-whip which he still held in his hand. The movement was so unexpected that before they could disarm him of the whip he had dealt several stinging, lacerating blows with it and the insult was answered. A stiletto-like blade flashed in the air, and, though many arms were interposed, they were too late to arrest it; the blade was buried in the major's breast, and the gallant horse and her once dashing rider went to their death together, after all.

A STILETTO-LIKE BLADE FLASHED IN THE AIR.

CHAPTER VIII

The wreck of a late moon arose above the river bank, and looked upon the white face of Marshall McNaughton as he lay, tranquil and composed, under the sky of the summer night, as though a loving hand had arranged the disheveled garments for peaceful burial. None, looking at the quiet face alone, would have thought of violence and murder; death had done its greatest work here, as so often happens to the face that does not fear it.

It was again the face of the gallant soldier of Cerro Gordo, lying upon the cool earth with a dark wound beneath the folded hands, as he had dreamed that he might lie in death upon some battle plain under the sky of old Mexico. Yet they had called it a kind fate that spared the young soldier on the field of honor! Nature had made him for a soldier; death became him better than life. This

deadly fairness brought out a wonderful likeness between this and another face just beyond the river and up through the grove, not a mile from the fatal spot. The same moonlight fell upon them, the same night breeze kissed them, first one and then the other as it wandered to and fro, fragrant with the odors of the summer night; both unconscious—both asleep.

Laurie had watched for her father through the long afternoon, sitting by the bend where she could see him first, Carlo's head resting on her knee; she had no anxiety about him to-day; was not Walter with him?

"We can always trust Walter, can't we, Carlo?" This hitherto neglected companion gave a joyous bark in answer to the beloved name. He took his seat beside her, remembering his master's charge. He laid his head in her lap and prepared for a doze, keeping the corner of one eye open, however, in order to be up with any stray farmer's dog that might come along, and receiving Laurie's caresses as philosophically as though he had known they were meant for some one else.

This watch continued until the sun got very low in the west; and she began then to feel a keen disappointment. She had thought Walter would bring him earlier this time.

"But they will come, Carlo—they will come," she kept saying over and over. Carlo thought they would. She said to herself, "In a few moments more the sun will be behind that hill; by that time they will come, I know they will; we will wait that long and then—go in."

Just as the reddening sun touched the summit, she heard the long expected sound of horse's feet; she stood behind the trees by the bend with her hand on Carlo's collar, and waited; but her cheek blanched to a deathly whiteness when the sound passed by, along the main road, and she heard the strange voices of the horsemen.

"Must have been a fine old place in its day," said one.

"Yes," replied the other voice, "there wasn't a finer place in the state twenty year ago but it's been a runnin' down pretty fast here lately. Reck'n things was at a pretty low

ebb when he put up that old nigger for sale."

"Yes, he peared moughty cut up 'bout it; well, I reck'n—" They passed out of hearing, two neighboring farmers on their way home from the sale.

The girl put a little hand on her heart in a pathetic gesture of pain; she thought at first they were talking of her own father; but the reference to the selling of a negro, that relieved her mind; of course they were talking of some other family. But it was getting late and she must go. Still no sign of horse or rider on the now darkening road.

"Come, Carlo," she said; and with the deepest sigh her young lips had ever yet breathed, she abandoned the watch, and went, with slow and heavy steps, towards the house; trying, oh, so hard! not to doubt her lover. Supper was a pretense. "Why, Honey, what make you take on so?" old Viney asked, looking at the pale face ruefully, her arms akimbo. "Dis ain't de fust time what yer pa did'n come home."

Poor little girl! she was trying to be brave, but she had been so disappointed; the tears

were very near the surface, and at the first touch of sympathy they overflowed. "Oh, mammy!" she whispered, as she clung round the old nurse's neck, lest the spirits of the air should hear her blame him, "but Walter promised he would bring him to me; I wish Uncle Ben were here—where is he?"

"Nebber min', Honey—nebber min';" said the old creature, trying to reassure her, though her own heart was very heavy. She knew that Uncle Ben would come no more in the old way. "My 'pinion is," she began after a little, as she was clearing away the untasted supper, "dat Mas'r Walter done struck up wid dem college chaps o' hisen, and deys gone off on some o' dere sky-larkin'—"

"Oh, mammy!"

"Nebber min', Honey; I knows all 'bout it; I tink Mas'r Walter mighty fine gem'man too, but ef you gits a husband what don' git drunk 'cepin' on Sat'days you's gwine ter be powerful lucky—you is."

But Laurie refused to take this novel consolation. She sat by an open window and watched the road until the twilight deepened

into night; still they did not come, and still she did not stir. The old nurse tried all her powers of intimidation first, of persuasion afterwards, but Laurie shook her head, too full to speak, and would not go.

So Aunt Viney sat down at last to share her watch, and in a few minutes, after the toils of the day, was sleeping heavily in her corner. The window at which Laurie sat was a wide, low one, opening to the east. One arm was round the huge dog's neck, and her tear-stained cheek was laid upon the other, which rested on the window-sill. The hours wore on and the sighs which broke poor Carlo's heart gradually ceased. The young eyes, unused to watching and to grief, slowly closed, and Laurie, thinking only that her lover had forgotten his promise, had cried herself to sleep.

She was sleeping thus, her head upon the folded white arm, when the moon rose, first upon the major's dead face by the river's brink, and touched the girl's bent head with its waning light; it shone into the eyes of the only waking watcher there, old Carlo—who,

in the prescience of his great race, foresaw misfortune, and would not quit his place by Laurie's side.

He sat there through the long hours of night, his nose pointed upward to the moon, and his silken ears falling back, while a look of human wistfulness shone through his eyes. The only sign of restlessness he betrayed was that now and then he would take one white-mittened paw from the girl's knee and put up the other; and there he kept his charge, faithful where the master had failed—wakeful while the daughter slept. At length the fair summer dawn broke in the east; and still Laurie slept the sleep of youth.

Old Viney woke with the first streak of light and went on tiptoe to another room, brought a light shawl, and, with love's gentle touch, laid it around her darling's shoulders, and went softly out to her tasks. She patted Carlo on the head and left them together. The light slowly broadened and brightened on the scene, and the peaceful Sabbath morning had begun its reign upon the earth.

Aunt Viney went about her task of getting

breakfast, her mind far from being in harmony with the serenity of the new day. She was oppressed with a persistent foreboding; she had energetically characterized herself "an ole black fool" many times, but, sing as she would, the feeling would not be gone.

She had certainly succeeded in working herself into a very hysterical state, for when she looked up from blowing the smoldering chunks into a blaze, and saw the familiar face of Uncle Ben looking silently in through the kitchen window, she uttered an ear-piercing shriek and dropped her head between her knees in true African fashion. When he spoke in his earthly voice, however, and convinced her there was nothing supernatural about the apparition, she arose and went about her work just as though nothing had happened.

"Come in, Unc' Ben," she said, "an' tell somebody whar you's come from. 'Fore Gawd! What you want ter be skeerin' folks outen dere min's fur, lookin'in dat kin o'quiet like, as if you jes' drop from de sky or som-'ers?"

"Well, fur de Lawd's sake, Sis' Viney, you

don' mean ter tell me yer ain't h'yearn nuffin 'bout it?" replied the visitor, as he entered (with a newly acquired dignity, Aunt Vieny thought,) placed his hat and stick on the floor, and parting the tails of a long black coat, also newly acquired, took his seat on the most available stool. Aunt Viney, without appearing to take much notice, was watching him keenly out of the corner of her eyes.

"Ain't you dun h'yearn nuffin'bout my bein' sol' to dat Hank Staples?" he continued. That brought her around.

"What!" she screamed, facing about and staring at the speaker; and, with open eyes and mouth, and hands on her hips, she drank in the rest of the story.

If there was anything the old fellow really loved, it was an audience, and a good story with which to regale it. He made the most of this melancholy occasion, and went on to give Aunt Viney, in the main, a pretty correct account of the day's proceedings, after what flourish his nature would; he was worked up to such a state of excitement during the recital of his experiences that he lost sight, for

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the time being, of his present errand. He came back to it with a shock of recollection.

"But see yere, Sis' Viney," he began in a changed tone, "what you tink when I tells you Mas'r Walter ain't dun been home all night? I h'yeard the ole gem'man git up more'n wunst in de night and go tiptoein' to his room ter see ef he wuz dere. I had a pallet down in de study for dat night, an' I could'n sleep nuther, kase I got to tinkin' 'bout all de strange circumstancials what's been happenin' lately, and so I h'yeard him shet de do' wid a awful sigh an' go back to his own room. I don' b'leive he slep' none 'tall all de night long, fur he wuz up walkin' in de gyarding jes' arter daylight, but he nebber let on, an' when he seed me, he jes'sez to me, smilin' at me kin' o' quiet like over his specs, 'Well, Unc' Ben, don' you want ter go over ter see how yer folks is gittin' 'long at de ole place dis mornin'?' I 'lowed as how I'd be powerful glad to go, an' when I was goin' out de gate, he sez, kin' o' offhand-like—"Say, Unc' Ben, you kin jes' ask 'em ef Mr. Walter wuz wid de major when he kum home las' night.'"